



(U) SID Celebrates Memorial Day

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(U) This Memorial Day millions of Americans will be enjoying time off with their families, taking advantage of the spring weather to pull out the backyard grill or taking the kids to the amusement park. Students will be making plans for their summer vacation while others will be planting their gardens, shopping for bargains at the mall, or doing the spring-deaning chores. Regardless of what you have planned, you have the freedom to choose your activity because of the men and women we honor on Memorial Day, a day set aside to remember the sacrifice of those who died in all of our nation's wars.

(U) Most historians agree that the observance of Memorial Day was born of compassion and empathy in 1863. As the Civil War raged, loved ones were cleaning Confederate soldiers' graves in Columbus, Mississippi, placing flowers on them. They noticed nearby the Union soldiers' graves, dusty, overgrown with weeds. Grieving for their own fallen soldiers, the Confederate women understood that the dead Union soldiers buried nearby were the cherished loved ones of families and communities far away. They cleared the tangled brush and mud from those graves as well as their own soldiers' graves and laid flowers on them all.

(U) Soon the tradition of a "Decoration Day" for the graves of fallen soldiers spread. On May 5, 1866, when the Civil War was over, Henry Welles of Waterloo, New York, closed his drugstore and suggested that all other shops in town also close up for a day to honor all soldiers killed in the Civil War, Union and Confederate alike. It was a gesture of healing and reconciliation in a land ripped apart by conflict.

(U) Sixteen years later, in 1882, the nation observed its first official Memorial Day. Memorial Day represents one day of national awareness and reverence, honoring those Americans who died while defending our nation and its values. Since its beginnings, our country has faced many threats that have tested its courage. From war-torn battlefields, conflicts at sea and air, to our current global war against terrorism, generations of brave men and women have fought and died to protect our democracy. Their sacrifices have made this nation strong and our world a better place. While it's right that we should honor these heroes every day for the contribution they have made to secure our nation's freedom, it's especially fitting that we remember them on Memorial Day.

(U) When thinking about the true meaning of Memorial Day, the words of Charles M. Province come to mind:

It is the Soldier, not the reporter,
Who has given us Freedom of the Press.

It is the Soldier, not the poet,
Who has given us Freedom of Speech.

It is the Soldier, not the campus organizer,
Who has given us the Freedom to demonstrate.

It is the Soldier, not the lawyer,
Who has given us the right to a fair trial.

And it is the Soldier--who salutes the flag,
Who serves the flag, and

Whose coffin is draped by the flag--
Who allows the protester to burn the flag.

(U) So what are your plans for Memorial Day? By all means enjoy your picnics and backyard barbeque, the parades and baseball games or time with family and friends. But please also remember to take time to reflect on the true meaning of Memorial Day. Something as simple as observing the National Moment of Remembrance at 15:00 local time...a chance for all Americans to pay tribute to those who placed country before self and paid the ultimate sacrifice for our freedom. We owe them a debt of honor and gratitude.

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